his face red all over. With blinking blue eyes under heavy gray eyebrows, he looked like Old Man Frost, the Russian counterpart of Santa Claus. He stared intently at me and touched my shoulder lightly. "You know, son, why the people have decided to kill you? Because they fear you will harm them. But what harm could you do if we gouge out your eyes? You would just walk like this. . . ."

He closed his eyes and took a few steps, imitating the walk of a blind man. Then he turned to the crowd. "Christians! Let us tear out the eyes of this one. Then he can go where he wants."

Somebody remarked that, blinded or not, the prisoners had to be guarded until the people decided what to do with them. But the old man insisted on his plan. "Give me some splinters, brother," he said to the watchman. The watchman handed him a piece of firewood and an ax. He cut the wood in long splinters, sharpened one of them, tried the end on his palm, and said mildly to me, "Say good-by to God's light, son!"

He stepped behind me, wedged my head between his knees, and leaned forward. He looked at me, I looked at him. He seemed to hesitate. Then he said piously, "God help me!" and struck me in the right eye. Perhaps he did not see clearly what he was doing or his hand trembled. The splinter tore in the eyebrow but missed the eyeball. Then he remarked sheepishly, "A splinter is not good for this job. Does somebody have a knife?"

"I have one!" volunteered a youngster. I saw his dirty jagged knife close to my face. The old man stretched his hand to get it, but the youngster shouted, "Keep off! I shall do it! The knife is mine."

Some people supported the old man, others sided with the youngster. The dispute was interrupted by outcries from the road in front of the station. "Here they come!"

Everyone rushed to the entrance, forgetting Eugene and me.

THE PEOPLE'S TRIAL

The prisoners—Thomas and the two girl teachers—had been placed at the head of the crowd pouring into the hall. After them came the sheriff, followed by a crowd of peasants. Many of them were drunk.

The sheriff stopped in the middle of the waiting room and said to the crowd, "You'll get an award for having helped me to catch these criminals. Now go home. I will deliver them to Novgorod."

His voice was drowned in outcries: "The people caught them! The people will try them!"